

Supreme Court rules in favor of Pater-to-Twisp powerline

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OMAK — There's no doubt that the Methow Valley needs a redundant power transmission line to keep energy flowing during times of crisis. Now that the state Supreme Court has weighed in on the related condemnation issue, the door is finally open for the Pateros-to-Twisp power transmission line to be built.

It's about time.

Last week, the high court ruled the Okanogan County Public Utility District has the authority to condemn even land managed by the state Department of Natural Resources — the political shenanigans of the agency were the last barrier to build the much-needed transmission line.

Publicly owned land managed by the agency is held in trust for “the benefit of all people and the support of schools,” the Supreme Court opinion noted. And what could be more beneficial to Methow Valley students than keeping the power on in times of crisis.

This past summer's Carlton Complex wildfire took out power to the valley as it burned poles and brought down lines. But the lights likely would not have gone out in the Methow Valley if the Pateros-to-Twisp transmission system had been in place and operational.

Had the power remained on, firefighting resources would've been better able to cope with the massive blaze. Fuel pumps would've been functional, allowing people to evacuate more easily. The remote valley could've remained fairly self-sufficient. And many of the valley's students would still be living in their family home instead of temporary housing.

Prior to the fire, Natural Resources officials put up roadblocks to the powerline at nearly every juncture possible. The delays in constructing the line cost ratepayers millions of dollars in delayed construction, litigation and other costs, all in the name of exerting “control” over land set aside solely for public benefit.

The new power transmission system will span 28 miles, bringing electrical redundancy to a valley that has been devastated by wildfire and mudslides. It is essential in times of crisis for the remote valley.

Let's hope construction will be expedited so the rural valley can have some stability should times of crisis arise again.